



Aalto University
School of Business

Mikkeli Campus

WHO'S THE BOSS? FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

Differences between female and male entrepreneurs in Finland

Elena Kukkonen

International Business

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Kristie Collins

Date of approval: 13 April 2017

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Objectives

The main objectives of this study were to examine the challenges female entrepreneurs have to face in their work, establish the motivations that push entrepreneurs to their career as entrepreneurs and identify different organizations and associations that concentrate on assisting female entrepreneurs in Finland. In addition, the objective of the thesis was to uncover the differences between male and female entrepreneurs in the Southern Finland.

Summary

While in the European Union the trend of female entrepreneurship is increasing, the trend in Finland is decreasing. Through qualitative research and literary review, the topic of entrepreneurship is researched in Finland. Different push and pull factors that determine why entrepreneurs begin their career in business are researched. Female entrepreneurs are not a homogeneous group, even though they have often been researched as such.

Conclusions

Based on the interviews with eight male and female entrepreneurs, there are not significant differences between the genders in the Finnish entrepreneurs. The actual differences between any entrepreneurs in an egalitarian country are based mostly on the background of the entrepreneur.

Key words: *entrepreneurship, female entrepreneur, male entrepreneur, Finland, European Union, women entrepreneurship, entrepreneur, decrease of entrepreneurs, push and pull factors*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship seems to be one of the trends nowadays and entrepreneurs are celebrated whenever they succeed. However, entrepreneurs face challenges in their every day life and have to battle for their work and for their success. Historically, women have been partly restricted even by law to be able to set up their own businesses. The challenges of female entrepreneurship and the possibilities of it will be in center of the discussion of this thesis. As will be later discussed in this thesis, the trend of the percentages female entrepreneurs decreasing in Finland contradicts the overall trend of the European Union, in which the percentages of female entrepreneurs have been increasing from 2003 to 2012. While entrepreneurship is often discussed in Finnish media, this particular trend of decrease in Finnish female entrepreneurship has not been brought up. This demonstrates the importance of research in this topic, as the overall element of entrepreneurship is essential in modern Western economies. This chapter will introduce the background of the research problem and the problem itself, after which the research questions and research objectives will be unveiled.

1.1. Background

Entrepreneurs have been celebrated in the 20th and 21st centuries for being bold, independent and challenging the norms. For the same reasons the entrepreneurs have not been supported by the society when they have possibly encountered challenges or difficulties. Entrepreneurship has been present for hundreds of years in different forms. Yet, for a long time, the entrepreneurial spirit of women was restricted by the state, as entrepreneurship was reserved by law only for men.

In today's Western societies, women are often considered as equal with regard to access to education and right to participate in work life. In developing countries women might not have equal rights to education, yet they are still encouraged by different organizations to become entrepreneurs, and through this, enhance their own possibilities to excel and gain monetary funds. The programs concentrated on female entrepreneurs can help the developing country in its economical, political and social aspirations to become as a state and society more successful and prosperous.

In 2012, in the 28 member states of the European Union 31 percent of all entrepreneurs were female, resulting in approx. 10.3 million women engaged in entrepreneurship (European Commission, 2014). The percentage of female entrepreneurs in the European Union is growing. Interestingly, according to the statistics published by the European Commission, the amount of female entrepreneurs in Finland has decreased by 1.2 percent from 2003 to 2012. Due to the contradiction in trends between Finland and the rest of the European Union, the research topic of this thesis is relevant and current.

Yet, what about a society which is considered to be egalitarian? Are the challenges and possibilities considered for entrepreneurs to be equal? Or what exactly are the differences?

These issues will be researched and analyzed in this thesis. In Finland, which is an excellent example of a gender-equal society, the topic of equality of genders in work and the similarities of genders with opportunities of life are regularly discussed by different newspapers, companies and professors of universities. The research helps to understand what are the actual differences of possibilities and challenges of entrepreneurs in such a society. Possibly the research results may be applied to other similar countries and societies.

The research methodology is based on secondary data from academic articles, official statistics, and others, as well as on primary data received from interviewing Finnish entrepreneurs for this thesis. The interviews will focus on questions that enable the research to address the topics discovered in the secondary data previously.

1.2. Research Problem

According to the European Commission (2014), between 2003 and 2012, the percentage of female entrepreneurship in European Union increased by 2.1 percentages. In Finland, the percentage of women entrepreneurs decreased from approx. 32% in year 2008 to the level of the European Union in 2012, 31%. During the whole nine years inspected in the European Commission's statistical report (2014), the Finnish percentage of female entrepreneurship has an overall trend of decreasing. It is essential to discover what are the main differences between male and female entrepreneurs in Finland that possibly could explain this concerning trend.

Based on this research problem, research questions and research objectives have been formed, which are introduced next.

1.3. Research Questions

To approach the defined research problem, the following three research questions have been formed:

1. What motivations push women to become entrepreneurs?
2. What challenges women entrepreneurs face when working?
3. How do women cope with the challenges of being entrepreneurs?

The aim is to gain answers to the three questions during the thesis, from the literature review and from the qualitative research completed for this thesis. The approach chosen to assist the research of these questions is to interview an equal amount of male and female entrepreneurs in Finland, which aims to discover the differences and similarities between both genders.

1.4 Research Objectives

The research objectives have been created based on the research questions discussed previously as follows:

1. Critically examine the challenges women entrepreneurs face in their work life
2. To establish which motivations are the main drivers for entrepreneurship as career choice
3. To identify organizations and associations assisting female entrepreneurs
4. To uncover differences, if any, between male and female entrepreneurs

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The chapter of literature review will reveal the different research related to the thesis topic.

This chapter will first discuss the overview of entrepreneurship with specifics about the history and Finland, after which female entrepreneurship will be put into focus. The following two sections of the chapter will look into motivations and challenges faced by entrepreneurs and these will be concluded at the end of the chapter by introducing the conceptual framework applied in this thesis.

The definitions of entrepreneurship and female entrepreneur will be discussed in the chapter.

2.1 Overview of Entrepreneurship

As a starting point for the thesis, it is important to understand and define the research subject: entrepreneurship. The challenge of defining entrepreneurship is that researchers do not seem to agree on the exact definition of entrepreneurship and on which characteristics are essential for an entrepreneur. Due to this variation, the research and analysis on the topic is challenging (Galloway et al, 2015).

In the academic research, entrepreneurship has been defined as a function, as a role, as a personality, and as a specific behaviour (Casson and Casson, 2014). However, no matter which perspective on entrepreneurship is taken, most researchers agree that the path of being an entrepreneur is very personal and subjective, and it is a never-ending progress through which a person evolves (Stevenson, 1990).

A common definition of an entrepreneur is a person who establishes companies and other business entities, and is self-employed through the company or business entities (Casson and Casson, 2014; Naude, 2013). The career of an entrepreneur is an aspiration shared by many in the capitalistic countries around the world (Minarcine and Shaw, 2016). By positive impact of the businesses, entrepreneurs can advance the competitiveness and productivity of a country they operate in, as well as strengthen the economic growth (Naude 2010, in Naude 2013).

Since entrepreneurs get to do what they want as their career and decide on the decisions of the company, they tend to enjoy high life satisfaction as well as high level

of job satisfaction (Naude, 2013). This might increase the national happiness index by providing goods and employment opportunities in the country (Naude, 2013). According to Dr Amrish (2014: 225), entrepreneurship is “the psyche makeup of a person”, a mindset that is set to create a new outlook on the status quo in the world. The personality type that is considered typical for entrepreneurs includes a positive attitude towards risk, creativeness, high levels of ambition and a need for achievement (Casson and Casson, 2014). Stewart and Ross (2007) identified successful entrepreneurs as high in task motivation and achievement motivation, and found that entrepreneurs preferred a more flexible environment with more autonomy (Minarcine and Shaw, 2016).

2.1.1 History of entrepreneurship

To understand the challenges and opportunities of entrepreneurship in 21st century, it is necessary to look at the history of entrepreneurship. Even though entrepreneurs are celebrated nowadays for their successes (Minarcine and Shaw, 2016) and are seen as an example for others, the history of entrepreneurship starts as early as in the medieval times according to Casson and Casson (2014). Many of the earliest recorded entrepreneurial activities were often encouraged or even organized by the monarchs, the state or the church (Casson and Casson, 2014). The crown and the church owned the land they operated on and through this could control the trade, even though the business risks appear to be considerably high in these times. The research shows that many of the challenges and possibilities of entrepreneurship have not changed much from medieval times (Casson and Casson, 2014).

Later, during the industrial revolution, entrepreneurship was considered as an essential factor to have moved the industry into the mass production of products and services. According to Casson and Casson (2014: 1224), entrepreneurship is a “basic human capability, which has been displayed in civilization through the times more or less”. Cultures and countries that enjoy a high success in entrepreneurship incorporate individualism with a high level of trust (Casson and Casson, 2014), and on the other hand, in terms of the 21st century, according to Naude (2013), score high on the Happiness Index. The Happiness Index is a United Nations based survey that ranks 156 countries and has been conducted in years 2012, 2013 and 2015.

2.1.2 Finland

This research focuses on entrepreneurship in Finland and thus understanding Finland's historical and economical context is of relevance. Finland celebrates 100 years of its independence in 2017, and it has been a parliamentary republic the whole time. The country has 5.4 million inhabitants and during the last 50 years it has transformed from an agriculture based economy in to a modern industrial one. Finland joined the EU in 1995 and has the euro as its currency. Because Finland is a member state of the European Union, it's entrepreneurship policy agenda manifests the European approach. This means that a part of the countries tax revenue is used on supporting smaller companies registered in the country (Storey, 2009 in Heinonen and Hytti, 2014).

In Finland, the national entrepreneurship policy is centrally guided by the government; the government decisions are locally implemented by the municipalities (Heinonen and Hytti, 2014). Each government holds the office for four years. As the political agenda changes with each new office, the entrepreneurship policy is not stable over longer periods of time. The policy in force reveals the focus of that particular government elected and the economic and social situation of Finland at that time.

During the four discussed in article policy programmes on entrepreneurship, the focus adopted by different governments has changed from small firms and the administration factors to individuals and the potential entrepreneurs (Heinonen and Hytti, 2014). In 2003, the issues of entrepreneurs' work-life balances were focused on. According to Heinonen and Hytti (2014), in the Finnish policy, the aspect of entrepreneurship has been often presented more as remedy to issues than an actual opportunity. As Finland is one of the countries on the data set of Naude's (2013) research, it can be said that the entrepreneurial activity positively provides to the countries life satisfaction score and thus the happiness until a certain threshold is met.

From gender balance perspective, Finland is considered to be rather egalitarian, as women and men are equally active in the employment and labour market (Kyrö, 2009). The Global Gender Gap Index published by the World Economic Forum (2016) reveals

that Finland with a score of 0.845 is the second leading country in equality in the world. According to Aaltio et al (2008), Finland had one of the highest numbers of self-employed women in Europe in 2004. Interestingly, the amount of women entrepreneurs in Finland decreased 1.2% from 2003 to 2012 according to the statistical report on women entrepreneurs of European Commission (2014). This is a trend seen in some other European Union member countries as well, as Poland (-1.7%), Bulgaria (-1.7%), Montenegro (-1.9%), Croatia (-2.3%), and Estonia (-3.3%) have a similar trend during the nine years reviewed. This trend of some countries having a decrease of women entrepreneurs contradicts the overall movement in European Union of increasing the percentages of women entrepreneurs from 28.9% to 31%. While in Finland and five other countries the percentage of women entrepreneurs has decreased, in main European economies such as in Germany (+3.2%) and in France (+2.7%) the trend has been opposite. When discussing Finland, Sweden is most often used as a point of comparison. Interestingly, in Sweden during the same period the amount of female entrepreneurs increased by 2.1 percent. The European Commission's report does not delve into the possible reasons of why the Finnish women entrepreneur's percentages have decreased.

Finnish educational system has been praised for its egalitarianism and the students' achievements in the PISA-studies. Importance of early entrepreneurial education has been recognized and supported through different programs by entrepreneurs as well as the Ministry of Education and Culture.

2.2 Female entrepreneurship

2.2.1 What is female entrepreneurship?

Similar to the definition of entrepreneurship, there are many different perspectives on what female entrepreneurship is and what are its specific challenges. While "entrepreneur" can refer to a man or a woman establishing business and having entrepreneurial qualities, the research shows that the word is even in 21st century heavily male-associated (Salmenniemi et al, 2011). Still, especially concerning economic growth, women engaging in entrepreneurial activity are understood as an untapped source of strength (Dr Ambrish, 2014).

As culture and society evolves gradually, the underlying understanding of women's role has not kept up with the fast evolving industrial development and modern economy. Even though women now have better possibilities to receive higher education, work and economic autonomy, there still remain traditional beliefs of a gender asymmetry, where the woman is positioned as the pillar of family, taking care of homemaking and parenting (Winn, 2004 in McGowan et al, 2012). Due to these historical backgrounds and roles defined by the society, according to Aaltio and Peltonen (2009), a woman is characterized as more orientated on the family than work when compared with a man. When applying to entrepreneurship, this characterization of both genders may explain why women and men are assumed to run their companies in distinct ways (Aaltio and Peltonen, 2009). Based on research conducted by Aaltio and Peltonen (2009), in Russia female entrepreneurs are considered to be operating from a necessity-based nature, as leadership is otherwise understood to be of authoritarian style, which is not seen as typical for women.

The treatment of female entrepreneurs varies in different countries and depends on the industry in question (Aaltio and Peltonen, 2009). As an example of the industry differences, retail is considered to be more suitable for females when compared to more male-dominated industries like technology, engineering and science (Allen et al 2008 in McGowan et al, 2012). There are industries in which mostly one of the genders dominates: for example, the hotels, restaurants and public administration are considered to be mostly dominated by women (Kyrö, 2009). According to Kyrö (2009), these women dominated industries are lower income industries when compared to male dominated ones, such as technology and science. Also, the Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum (2016) states that in Finland there is still work to be made to fully close the gap in economic participation and opportunity between the genders.

2.2.2 Research Focused on Male Entrepreneurs

Even though the topic of entrepreneurship has been of interest to academia during the 20th and 21st centuries, the research has concentrated on other issues than the gender of the entrepreneur. When the research focus has been on female entrepreneurs, they have been considered as a distinctive, separate group. The research findings have

then been attached to the previous theories of entrepreneurship, which have historically been constructed mostly on male entrepreneurs (Salmenniemi et al, 2011; Baker, Aldrich and Liou 1997 in Menzies et al, 2004; Galloway et al, 2015). Furthermore, the research focused on female entrepreneurs seems to be based on the previous general research on entrepreneurs and thus it will be contrasted against male entrepreneurs (Ahl, 2006). Stevenson (1990) reflects on the challenge and concludes that it is a male bias that has been extended to the research on women entrepreneurship.

Some areas have been more intriguing for academia than others in research of female entrepreneurship. An excellent remark, though often overlooked, on research of female entrepreneurs is made by Brush and Edelman (2000 in Menzies et al, 2004): past studies might have shown more similarities between female and male entrepreneurs than differences, which might be the cause for academia being more hesitant to study the issue. The difference between female and male entrepreneurs research being so different might be that the researchers have often focused on the statistically significant differences and not concentrated on the more significant similarities the two groups have had (Ahl, 2006; Menzies et al, 2004).

However, Galloway et al (2015) argues that opening the research to a feminist lens could open new methodological approaches on the entrepreneurship research. Stevenson (1990) highlights the importance to include the different experiences women entrepreneurs have to the research (Galloway et al, 2015). According to Ahl (2006), one of the reasons why female entrepreneurship is an area of untapped academic research is its more marginal character when compared to other research areas; as the careers of the individual researchers depend heavily on their publications, this area of research is easily overlooked.

In the research papers reviewed for this thesis, the exclusion of the female entrepreneurs in the research conducted has become evident. Interestingly, the research paper on the history of entrepreneurship conducted by Casson and Casson (2014) included only examples of male entrepreneurial actions in the medieval times and did not discuss the female opportunities in the history. Some studies, on the other hand, have not particularly been designed to study men, but during the process the

researchers have not included any female respondents (Stevenson, 1990). This is one of the ways the male bias can be seen in the research.

Gender has become a central question of the female entrepreneurship research question. According to Ahl (2006: 597), gender is “a result of upbringing and social interaction, it varies in time and place”. Generally, one of the traits of entrepreneurs is risk-taking, as it is not possible to venture into new business ideas without encountering at least a little bit of risk. The trait is, however, largely associated with masculinity (Salmenniemi, 2011). Thus, already starting with the stereotypes about entrepreneurs, many of the traits are deemed to be masculine (Galloway et al, 2015). One of the most key traits seen in entrepreneurs is they want to grow business and be the leaders, which again is seen as masculine (Galloway et al, 2015).

As a stereotype, the image of an entrepreneur is a heroic, strong and dominant self-made man (Ahl, 2006). Thus, even the research conducted specifically on female entrepreneurs has often specific hypotheses about the family situation, their environment, the individual and what kind of business the entrepreneur would be surrounded with (Ahl, 2006). Researchers Garcia and Welter (2011) state that there is a conflict in the research between what is considered to be female with how an entrepreneur is defined. Essentially, once both genders have the desire to establish their own business, there is no difference between the success in starting the company (Afandi and Kermani, 2015).

2.3 Motivations of Entrepreneurs

One of the most essential factors of becoming an entrepreneur is the motivation of the individual (Machado et al, 2016). After weighting the motivations against possible difficulties, the potential entrepreneur will decide on what to do about the business idea. There are different views on whether the driving motivations are the same for both genders. The motivations and critical challenges are typically the same for both women and men when considering the decision to venture to entrepreneurship (McGowan et al, 2012). Contradicting this, the research of Machado et al (2016) shows that businesses are created by different genders for distinctively different reasons.

No matter the gender, the creation of a company can be understood to be shaped by the state, the possible experience of the industry and financial issues the entrepreneur has to face (Hisrich and Peters, 2004 in Machado et al, 2016). As entrepreneurship is for many even successful entrepreneurs not the first career, but rather a second career established, Minarcine and Shaw (2016) conducted that it is not only the financial motives that push potential entrepreneurs into their second career. This contradicts the popular stereotype about hard-core businessmen, who are only interested in financial gains. Possibly one of the most important goals of entrepreneurs is success, which is, however, defined by every person in a slightly different way. In the study of Minarcine and Shaw (2016), the entrepreneurs understood success meaning freedom of choice, to be the masters of their own destiny, to be happy, and be able to vary the work-life balance. According to Carree and Verheul (2012), internal motivations make the entrepreneurs more satisfied with the experience of entrepreneurship than if the motivators are extrinsic.

According to McGowan et al (2012), the decision to start a company of an entrepreneur is inclined to be linked to the balance of push and pull factors. These factors are essential when making a decision to start a new company as well as when deciding to continue it during difficult times. The concept of push and pull factors is set out in more detail below. This concept has been used for analysing interviews conducted for this thesis.

The push factors are the negative factors that can be challenging and make the potential entrepreneurs doubt their decision to start a company in the first place (McGowan et al, 2012). The lack of family support is a big push factor, as the families provide the safety nets (Zanakis et al, 2012 in Machado et al, 2016). However, Salmenniemi's (2015) research showed that not all entrepreneurs give as much weight to this factor, as they stated that despite the negative view of the family on the business, they were focused on succeeding with the company.

The personal preparation is essential: previous management experience and training are critical in the career of entrepreneurs. The lack of them can easily become a push factor (Machado et al, 2016; Menzies et al, 2004). Preferably training should be conducted already as a part of general education. Especially at this stage of education,

the most effective way to positively influence the students is the teachers' personal interest in entrepreneurship (Ruskovaara and Pihkala, 2015). One challenge identified by female entrepreneurs is lack of access to suitable training. According to Dr Ambrish (2014), gaining access to structured skill training could change the gender differences between entrepreneurs in the 21st century.

Not having the first capital and no easy access to credits from financial institutions might be one of the main push factors in many countries (Machado et al, 2016). While society is changing, the language barriers and discrimination feared and experienced can be push factors for many entrepreneurs (Shinnar and Young, 2008 in Minarcine and Shaw, 2016). Having a proper work-life balance is not taken for granted by those wishing to be entrepreneurs (McGowan et al, 2012; Dr Ambrish, 2014). Especially for women, the conflict of the entrepreneur's own and society's views on the role of a woman, mother and a daughter can result in personal feelings of guilt (McGowan et al, 2012).

The pull factors are the possibilities and attractions the potential entrepreneurs see in the career choice of becoming an entrepreneur.

The stereotypically common belief of the upside of entrepreneurship is the possibility to earn money (Naser et al 2012 in Machado et al, 2016), which provides financial independence for the entrepreneur. Interestingly, in McGowan et al's study of 2012, it was found that non-financial factors are more important than financial one's. The pull factor of independence, the possibility to decide for yourself what to do and the flexibility of time is intriguing to many entrepreneurs (McGowan et al, 2012; Minarcine and Shaw, 2016). The self-fulfilment factor is equally important to both women and men considering to become entrepreneurs (Machado et al, 2016; McGowan et al, 2012). The lack of satisfaction and opportunities in the previous workplace can serve as a good motivator for many to establish their own business (Minarcine and Shaw, 2016). Especially women have been found to start their own businesses because of the frustration caused by the corporate workplace (Mallon and Cohen 2001 in Minarcine and Shaw, 2016).

2.4. Challenges Faced by Entrepreneurs

As with push and pull factors, the variety of challenges an entrepreneur may face during the business career is vast. From these challenges, the following are regularly brought up in the research as the most pertinent: stress, negotiations and mentors. These three challenges are discussed in detail below.

2.4.1 Stress

According to Kokila and Subashini (2016: 87), the “stress faced by the entrepreneur are (sic) inseparable” in the environment the entrepreneurs operate in. Stress can be defined as a response of the body in cases where anticipated pressure is applied so that the human body does not feel the ability to cope with it (Kokila and Subashini 2016). Every person copes with stress in a different way and there is no particular one and only correct way to handle it.

The cause of stress naturally is different for each entrepreneur. In academic research the following four main causes of stress have been identified: risk-taking, loneliness of the experience, considerable responsibility and work-life balance (Cardon and Patel, 2013). Particularly for female entrepreneurs, the causes of stress include also lack in engagement with the business, as well as a shortage of experience, education and knowledge (Kokila and Subashini, 2016). One may also disagree with such statement, as these causes for stress are likely to be encountered by any entrepreneur, no matter the gender.

2.4.2 Negotiations

As an entrepreneur, one of the important skills is to be able to reach set goals through good negotiation skills. It is a specific interpersonal skill, which can seem as intimidating and manlike to women (Guerrero and Richards, 2015). The stereotypes of genders in these situations supports men and seems to negatively reflect on women (Miles and Clanney, 2010 in Guerrero and Richards, 2015). According to stereotypes, a man in negotiations is rational, dominant and confident, while a woman in negotiations is seen as submissive and emotional, even as the weak party (Hames, 2011 in Guerrero and Richards, 2015). The article by Guerrero and Richards (2015)

claims that female entrepreneurs would lack poise and belief in themselves when challenged in negotiation situations. However, this seems like a deeply personal feeling that may be attributed to any entrepreneur and is not something that should be generalized to all female entrepreneurs. Interestingly, women tend to get self-confidence and credibility from the style of clothes more than men find (Aaltio and Peltonen, 2009). Especially in negotiation situations this can help the female entrepreneur to bolster her confidence.

In some countries the gender stereotypes are running so deep in the culture that the woman entrepreneurs have to find new, creative ways to effectively being able to proceed with their own businesses. According to Salmenniemi's (2011) study on female entrepreneurs in Russia, most women have experienced gender discrimination during negotiations. The participants of the study revealed taking a male business partner or husband with them to the negotiations.

As with any skill set, training of negotiation skills is essential to minimizing this entrepreneurial challenge. In the study completed by Guerrero and Richards (2015), 88% of respondents stated not to have had any previous coaching about negotiations before the training sessions the researchers provided. Providing coaching and assisting for development of negotiation skills might be one of the approaches to improve female entrepreneurs' success and potential in business.

2.4.3 Mentors

A mentor is a role model and someone who is willing to invest their time and resources into discussing different challenges and possibilities with their mentee. Not all professionals have a mentor – on one hand, not all professionals consider it necessary or useful to have a mentor, and on the other hand, for those wishing to be supported by one, it is not easy to find a suitable person for the role of mentor. Mentor can support and steer the mentee to understand the entrepreneurs' maximum potential, so that the mentee will reflect on who they aspire to be and how it is possible to achieve the goals set with the mentor (Parsloe, 2009 in Laukhuf and Malone, 2015).

There are many upsides in having a mentor as an entrepreneur, and a successful mentor relationship can support female entrepreneurs to make decisions as well as inspire the entrepreneur to aspire towards bigger goals (Woodd, 1997 in Laukhuf and Malone, 2015). Female entrepreneurs have the opportunity to gain objectivity about their management of the business while working with the mentor (Laukhuf and Malone, 2015). Since entrepreneurship is an always evolving process with successes and obstacles, a mentor might help the mentee to overcome the downfalls and see them as a possibility to learn from their mistakes. Being a mentor requires a lot from an entrepreneur. A mentor has to be self-assured about the skills capable in attending to the mentee (Sandberg, 2013 in Laukhuf and Malone, 2015) and about the time and dedication, which is needed to have a successful mentorship in the first place (St-Jean and Audet, 2009 in Laukhuf and Malone, 2015).

During 2012 and 2013, Laukhuf and Malone (2015) conducted an extensive study about mentoring. One of the interesting emerged themes was the advice the participants felt they had gotten very often: it is important to define what success means and design and pursue to grow the business in that way. Creating strategies to achieve the success defined previously helps an entrepreneur not to lose the understanding of a long-term ambition. Another advice commonly received seemed to be the importance of the work-life balance the mentee wanted for herself. Laukhuf and Malone's study was performed with 22 women entrepreneurs. While it is not a large enough sample to draw definitive conclusions from, it is a useful insight into what the mentorship experience could provide to some entrepreneurs.

Yet, according to Williams (2011 in Laukhuf and Malone, 2015), most female entrepreneurs do not have a mentoring relationship. Because of the possibilities successful mentorships can provide to the mentee, it can be considered as a good asset for women entrepreneurs seeking opportunities to evolve in their professional and personal lives (Laukhuf and Malone, 2015).

2.5 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this thesis is constructed on the basis of the research discussed in the literature review as follows:

The motivations and challenges of entrepreneurship consist of different push and pull factors, that influence the potential entrepreneur's decisions of becoming one. The push and pull factors can be unique to one of the genders, or seen as commonality to both male and female entrepreneurs. As the experience of entrepreneurship is deeply personal, the push and pull factors can depend on individual characteristics and the possible influences of family. There will always be push and pull factors to consider, when entrepreneurship is in question, yet the pull factor has to be stronger for the entrepreneur to continue with his business.

This framework will be researched in a Finnish context, but could be useful in other contexts as well. Finland is considered to be quite egalitarian, which could be expected to show thus more commonalities than unique aspects between the female and male entrepreneurs.

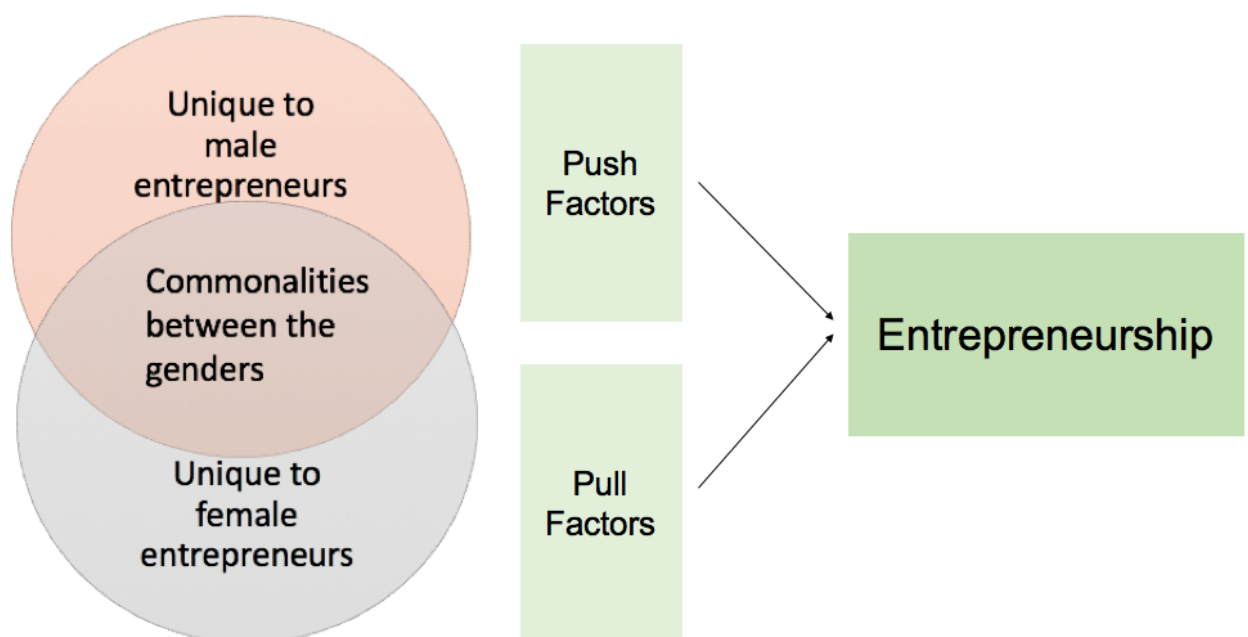


Table 1: Conceptual Framework

2.6 Conclusion of Literature Review

Even though female entrepreneurs are essential for economic growth and national success, the topic is often researched in a way that it is generalizing all female entrepreneurs as a single group. Entrepreneurs are not a homogeneous group. Due to this, it is necessary not to settle for quantitative research on the topic, but appreciate the stories and experiences told by entrepreneurs through qualitative research about what it means to be an entrepreneur, what motivated them and how they deal with the challenges they face in their work.

The literature review chapter was the base, on which the questions for the interviews, seen in Appendix 1, were build upon.

3. METHODOLOGY

The chapter on methodology will demonstrate the different methods used to gain knowledge and information about the thesis topic. The chapter is divided into two parts: the first focusing on what method was used for the thesis and the other part concentrating on what was the criteria for choosing the interviewees.

3.1 Qualitative method: interviews

It is necessary to understand that entrepreneurs, whether male or female, are not a homogeneous group, but are all individuals and have their own paths, opinions and views on the topic. The best way to study entrepreneurship is not to conduct quantitative studies which would miss the diversity but to research it with the help of qualitative interviews (Stevenson, 1990; Machado et al, 2016). This could give more insight into the actual issues concerning the women choosing the career path. For these reasons, qualitative interviews have been identified as the most suitable approach for conducting the data collection for this thesis.

The methodology chosen to research the thesis topic used a qualitative framework, specifically interviews. While the selected approach enables more in-depth interviews and personalized questions to be asked from the entrepreneurs to further develop the research, it does somewhat limit the topics to be researched by focusing on the chosen sample of questions. The chosen approach has been successfully applied also in relevant academic research, such as articles “Portraits of Russian Women Entrepreneurs” by Aaltio and Peltonen (2009) and “Gender identities and practices: Interpreting women entrepreneur’s narratives” by Garcia and Welter (2011).

There were eight interviews conducted for the research, with an equal amount of female and male entrepreneurs interviewed for the research. This gives a balanced insight into the challenges and motivations of the entrepreneurs of both genders in Finland.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, which enabled asking the entrepreneurs more specified follow-up questions when considered necessary. Through this methodological approach, more detailed information was received from the interviews, which helped bringing the research forward. All questions of the semi-structured interview are listed in Appendix 1. The in-depth interviews with each of the entrepreneurs lasted between 15 minutes and one hour, depending on the willingness of the entrepreneurs to elaborate on questions.

The interviews were conducted during February and March 2017 in Helsinki. Nearly all of the interviews were completed face-to-face between the researcher and the entrepreneur. The personal approach was selected specifically to gain trust of the entrepreneurs. Only one of the interviews (entrepreneur D) was conducted over the phone, due to the geographical challenges.

3.2 Criteria for Choice of Interviewees

Results of this research based on qualitative interviews depends directly on the quality and characteristics of the interviewees chosen. Thus, defining and maintaining the criteria for choice of interviewees has been essential for the success of the research of the thesis. Following criteria was identified as important for the research:

- a) Gender balance: an equal amount of male and female entrepreneurs
- b) Limited geographical scope: all businesses operated mainly from Southern Finland
- c) No industry specific: various industries to ensure that the research focuses on general business environment and is not narrowed down to the challenges and opportunities of a specific industry
- d) Company type: all private equity companies and not listed companies, to ensure that the entrepreneurs have an active role in the company
- e) International background: to reflect the current international business environment, at least one entrepreneur in both gender groups to be of non-Finnish ethnical background

After the criteria were defined, it was quite challenging to obtain the interviews from the suitable entrepreneurs. Through application of this criteria many potential entrepreneurs were identified and contacted with interview requests. Unfortunately, many declined the request for interview or did not return the calls. Understandably, for entrepreneurs it can be challenging to find time and interest to participate in interviewing process.

One of the entrepreneurs interviewed is a family member of the thesis researcher. Two of the interviewees have a background from the same country, Russia, and other six entrepreneurs are from Finland originally. None of the entrepreneurs were aware of each other during the research. This anonymity was important to secure so that the perception of the interviewees on entrepreneurship in Finland were not compromised by the knowledge of other entrepreneurs participating in the research.

No entrepreneur had knowledge about the questions before the actual interview and all interviews were recorded by the researcher. For this to be ethically correct, permission was asked of each entrepreneur prior to recording. Similarly, all entrepreneurs were told about the anonymity of their identities and companies in the thesis. This was done to build trust between each entrepreneur and the researcher. The interviews were conducted in different places: café's, at home, and in the office space of the entrepreneur. It has to be acknowledged that this might cause some

inconsistencies in how openly the entrepreneurs were willing to discuss some questions. All but one interviews were conducted in Finnish, and one of the interviews was completed in the Russian language.

The analysis of the interviews was conducted after transcribing the tapes. General information about the entrepreneurs is in Appendix 2.

4. FINDINGS

To analyze the interviews, two approaches were available: to review the interview results of each entrepreneur separately, or to analyze per each question separately. For the purposes of thesis research, the latter approach was considered as the more suitable one, as the aim of this research is to analyze common and unique factors of the genders and not of individual entrepreneurs. Each of the selected questions will be discussed one by one, and the answers from the interviews will be analyzed from the perspective set by the research questions. The whole list of the 13 interview questions is in the Appendix 1.

For clarity, the structure of this part of the analysis is as following: first the question is stated, then the answers of the two gender groups are compared and analyzed. After all questions will be analyzed, the results will be discussed and possible conclusions will be drawn.

4.1 What Pushed You to Start Your Path to Entrepreneurship?

One of the first questions asked of each interviewee was how they have started their entrepreneurial life. Each had their own, unique path. However, the following four common themes could be identified in the replies of the interviewees:

1) Freedom

The interviewees felt that starting a new career path in entrepreneurship could bring them freedom, when compared to their work at that time.

2) Frustration with previous workplace

Especially the work culture and organization in the previous workplace seemed to be causing a lot of frustration with the entrepreneurs.

3) Possibility of earning more money

The entrepreneurs mentioned money as one of the reasons for starting their own company. For example, entrepreneurs felt motivated by possibility to earn more money due to family reasons (e.g. retirement of spouse).

4) Entrepreneurial spirit

Most of interviewees mentioned growing up with an entrepreneurial spirit.

Interestingly, even the entrepreneurs with background in Russia mentioned this characteristic to be present in their youth, despite the fact that entrepreneurship was forbidden in the Soviet Union at that time.

Even in a limited group of interviewed entrepreneurs, no single theme was present in each answer to this question. This testifies to the variety of life paths leading to entrepreneurship.

The analysis of the replies revealed no noticeable gender differences between the answers of entrepreneurs for this question. The aspect of monetary gains was mentioned equally often by male and female entrepreneurs. Though subtly, the entrepreneurial spirit was the only theme brought up in a more direct way by more male than female entrepreneurs during the interviews.

4.2 Entrepreneurship Can Entail Long and Inconsistent Working Hours. How Do Your Family and Close Friends View and Cope with the Fact That You Are an Entrepreneur?

This question was found to be quite personal by many of the entrepreneurs interviewed. One of the entrepreneurs even declined to answer the question altogether, which might however be explained by the family relation between the researcher and the entrepreneur. Some entrepreneurs answered the question in such

manner that clearly showed avoidance of the actual question. In general, there were more men avoiding the question in this interviewee group than female entrepreneurs.

One of the male entrepreneurs pointed out that the hours might not be an issue because he had bought the company and not had to find the first customers himself. Another male entrepreneur said it his family has a good approach towards the time required, as he had met his wife around the same time as he started his first business. Because of this, she and the following children were well aware and prepared for what being an entrepreneur meant.

The female entrepreneurs in the interviews seemed to be more open to answer the question, telling more about the possible challenges they have had with the families and friends. As three of the female entrepreneurs have children, they drew attention to that aspect. Two of the interviewees said that it was a blessing in itself that their children had already grown, so that starting a business did not interfere with the childhoods. A common aspect of the female entrepreneurs was that their husbands or families in general seemed to be helping a lot with the company or with the household. As one of the female entrepreneurs expressed: “The hardest thing is that after becoming entrepreneur you don’t have a certain peace of mind (..) It’s not something that others will see on Facebook or Instagram.”

4.3 Has There Been Entrepreneurship in Your Family and Surroundings When Growing Up?

Of the four male entrepreneurs, two had one or both parents as entrepreneurs. Yet, one of the entrepreneurs saw it as a positive example (Entrepreneur B) and one had experienced it more as a cautionary example, as the company had not succeeded at all (Entrepreneur D). Two male entrepreneurs had no previous connections to entrepreneurship through the family or surroundings. One of the entrepreneurs explained this to be due to circumstances, as no entrepreneurship was allowed in the Soviet Union in his childhood. However, he did remember how in his childhood some entrepreneurial activity was undertaken unofficially.

Of the female entrepreneurs, none felt that entrepreneurship in their families would have impacted them in childhood. Again, one of the entrepreneurs did point out the fact that growing up in the Soviet Union restricted any potential entrepreneurship. Interestingly, two female entrepreneurs also had one parent as entrepreneur in their childhood, yet that they did not consider this to impact in any way their lives or decisions to become entrepreneur. When compared to the replies provided by male entrepreneurs, it could be stated that either men interviewed could recognize and acknowledge more clearly the influence of family on their own choice of career as entrepreneur, or that the decisions of women were indeed more independent from their family background. In any case, this is a topic that should be researched further prior to drawing any conclusions.

4.4 What Were Your Expectations About Being an Entrepreneur Before Starting the Career of Entrepreneurship?

When asked about the expectations about the entrepreneurship before the start of the company many entrepreneurs smiled or laughed. The assumption of the researcher was to have two different answers to this question: either realistic or naïve expectations.

Unexpectedly, from each female and male entrepreneur groups one interviewee mentioned not to have any expectations at all about the career of entrepreneur. Two interviewees in the male group mentioned having quite naïve expectations. “The company would grow endlessly”, said entrepreneur A. This turned out to be quite naïve, as he commented. Entrepreneur B agreed with that, answering “I didn’t think anything bad could happen”. Only one of the male entrepreneurs (entrepreneur D) answered the question with having a realistic expectation of the company before becoming an entrepreneur. This could be explained by the entrepreneur working in the company for multiple years before acquiring it and becoming an entrepreneur. This gave him a clear insight in what the company’s situation was.

From the three female entrepreneurs who had expectations about the entrepreneurship, only one expressed her anticipation of “being able to regulate the working hours easily and having lots of time to do other things”, being very naïve and

simple. The two others reviewed their expectations to be very realistic: both expected there to be lots of work.

Thus, of the interviewed entrepreneurs the female ones had slightly more realistic expectations towards the choice of career as entrepreneur.

4.5 What Do You Feel Is Most Challenging in Entrepreneurship?

This was, again, one of the questions that some entrepreneurs seemed to consider to be quite personal. However, all interviewees did answer the question. It can be questioned how openly and honestly the question was answered.

The most common answer of the interviewees were the challenges faced with their own employees. “It is difficult to find the right person”, was the reply of five entrepreneurs. As the company requires a lot of their time and thoughts, the entrepreneurs want to be able to trust the new employee and see them to be committed to the company.

Interestingly, one of the female interviewees mentioned as the most challenging part “selling of my own know-how”. During the interviews, few of the entrepreneurs mentioned the loneliness of entrepreneurship, especially if there is no business partner involved in the company. “The decisions have to be made alone and only you are responsible for the outcome. No outsider has a clear picture of the situation and all the advice they can give you ends up being not relevant” commented entrepreneur A.

4.6 Is There Anything That Balances Your Life? What Is It?

As entrepreneurship is most often not a workplace visited from 9 to 5, but more of a passion and something that occupies the entrepreneurs’ thoughts constantly, it is essential to have other activities to balance life and give peace of mind. To this question, the answers are fairly similar by both female and male entrepreneurs. As expected, nearly all answered that it is their families, friends and hobbies that bring balance into their lives. Additionally, all entrepreneurs brought up nature as an important factor in their lives. Even though it might be a stereotype that nature is vital to the Finns, in these interviews it was easily recognized.

“Once a year, we travel with my husband for a week to the archipelago. It’s silent, peaceful and there are no people around. Bliss!”, answered entrepreneur G.

4.7 What Feels Most Natural in Entrepreneurship?

As this question was asked, it seemed that some of the entrepreneurs found it quite hard to answer while others knew the answer right away.

Three of the male entrepreneurs answered the question directly with “A deal”, as they felt the essence of the business to be concentrated in successful deal making. In addition, one of the male entrepreneurs pointed out freedom as one of the best and most natural aspects in entrepreneurship. “Making decisions yourself” was also a typical reply in the female entrepreneur group. One of the interviewed female entrepreneurs felt that getting great deals and selling was also the most natural aspect of the business for her. Other female entrepreneurs answered in ways that showed the client communication and work to be important.

The differences between the genders seem to be like a mirror image of what is important to both groups: for men, making a deal was the most natural aspect in entrepreneurship, while for women this was freedom. In both gender groups 75% of interviewees were of same opinion. However, as the sample group of entrepreneurs interviewed is relatively small, no generalizations can be made. This might be a suitable topic for further research.

4.8 Have You Applied for External Financing?

Entrepreneurs often seek and apply for external financing. This is done to help the company to start, to finance some bigger investments, and to ensure capability of company to compete for big projects. All of the interviewed entrepreneurs have applied for external financing, with different outcomes.

Before analyzing the answers, it is important to understand two main state supported channels through which entrepreneurs can apply for external financing in Finland. First, the so-called “starttiraha” (startup grant) is a grant awarded by the Public Employment and Business Services of the local TE Office in Finland and has to be applied for

separately. The startup grant is intended only for applicants, who have the potential to create profitable full-time entrepreneurship in Finland.

Second, another instance from which entrepreneurs can apply for loans and financing, is Finnvera, a Finnish state owned enterprise, focusing on financing Finnish companies to support their growth and internationalization.

The entrepreneurs applied and received for external financing as following:

Entrepreneurs	Finnvera		Startup Grant		Other
	Applied for	Received	Applied for	Received	
Female	1	1	2	1	1
Male	3	3	-	-	1

Table 2: External Financing Applied and Received by Entrepreneurs

Of the female entrepreneurs, three have received external financing. Entrepreneur E considered the external financing process not to be difficult, as her husband was responsible for completing the application process. Similarly, entrepreneur G applied for startup grant, in addition “easily got Finnvera to back the loan” and even received an additional loan from a bank. Interestingly, entrepreneur H had applied for startup grant but did not receive it, as the local TE Office considered her plan to be too bold in the monthly turnover estimate. The entrepreneur H disagreed with this decision and commented that the monthly turnover estimate “it was quite low in the business area”. However, after that experience the entrepreneur has not had particular needs for investments or external financing.

Of interviewed female entrepreneurs, only entrepreneur F began her business without any external financing, as she was at the time still working and studying in addition to the business. Because of this, the startup grant was not an alternative. Over the years, her company has financed its primary business by completing some side ventures. The entrepreneur has also sought external financing, which her parents have vouched for.

It seems that male entrepreneurs in this question were more eager to apply for financing vouched by Finnvera than the female entrepreneurs, as only male entrepreneur had not applied for financing from Finnvera. Three male entrepreneurs applied for, and received, financing through Finnvera from banks. In general, male entrepreneurs viewed the process to be “fairly easy” and entrepreneur B commented on it being similar as selling anything else, as selling the idea of the business. The only male entrepreneur who had not applied for Finnvera backed financing answered to the question: “In Finland, you get a loan only if you have something to withhold for it. If you don’t have it and have a more specific business, it is impossible”.

Of the interviewed entrepreneurs both male and female entrepreneurs applied for external financing similarly, with the preference of Finnvera as the financing choice by male entrepreneurs. It could be concluded that whether or not an entrepreneur applied for external financing depended on the industry and business specific aspects.

4.9 Do You Have a Mentor Relationship with Someone?

Mentoring is often considered as a way for the entrepreneurs to evolve and gain new insights about themselves and their companies. The benefits of mentoring apply both to being a mentor and to having a mentor.

Only half of the interviewed entrepreneurs are a mentor or have a mentee. Interestingly, only a female entrepreneur has a mentor herself, as she felt that her franchising company’s management is mentoring her. None of the male entrepreneurs had a mentor. Two male entrepreneurs mentor their own employees and other entrepreneurs. One female entrepreneur stated that she is mentoring her own employees. In addition, one of the female entrepreneurs mentioned the need for a mentor, as she wants to expand her company.

4.10 Are You Involved with the Different Programs and Associations Designed to Help Entrepreneurs in Finland?

In Finland, there are multiple organizations and associations that focus on helping entrepreneurs. Some of them are designed to focus on only female entrepreneurs, some are welcoming all entrepreneurs. From the interviewed entrepreneurs, it

appeared that nearly all entrepreneurs viewed the organizations to be beneficial and to have many functions that could be useful in a difficult situation.

Three male entrepreneurs are or have been active in some organizations. Especially entrepreneur C felt strongly that the organizations tend to overflow the new entrepreneurs with too much information and are, from his point of view, too old fashioned. Because of this, he has quit the activities in the different organizations. Only one male entrepreneur considered it as not necessary to be involved in associations, as he experienced his business to be so specific that there would not be sufficient peer support.

Interestingly, in contrast to male entrepreneurs, three female entrepreneurs have not been active or participated at all in the organizations. As reasons for this were mentioned issues with time management and the entrepreneurs' personality of "a lone wolf". Only one female entrepreneur, F, was actively involved with different entrepreneurial associations and organizations. Her view was different to that of others: "I have won prizes by different organizations for the business. I am quite competitive. (...) I'm not sure what exactly the prizes have given me, but at least they don't take anything from me either". She brought up the idea that it's the best way to network with other entrepreneurs and it gives peer support that only other entrepreneurs can give. In addition, she is actively holding speeches in schools and universities to educate the youth about entrepreneurship and the challenges and possibilities of it.

4.11. Conclusion

The analysis of entrepreneurs' replies to the interview questions reveals no significant differences or themes supporting the assumption that there would be considerable differences between the genders. This conclusion is in line with the results of the literature review.

Instead of gender differences, the replies to the interview questions raise individual characteristics of the entrepreneurs, such as family influence, ethnical background and the industry they operate in. Thus, further research in this thesis will analyze the interviews from a perspective concentrating on these individual characteristics rather than gender differences.

5. DISCUSSION

After analyzing the interview replies discussed in the previous chapter, it becomes clear that the focus of the analysis has to be set not on the differences between the genders, but on the differences of personalities and people. Due to this, in this discussion chapter the focus will be expanded also to other factors than gender. The interview structure was build in such a way, that the pull and push factors are clearly evident in multiple answers of entrepreneurs.

5.1 Decision to become an entrepreneur

Interestingly, when asked about whether the decision took long to make, if they would become entrepreneurs, the answers varied slightly. Most of the interviewees answered that it was a quick decision, as the push factors from previous work places were high enough for them to be willing to start a new career as entrepreneurs. Only one interviewee E commented “I would have wanted to work in IKEA rather (..), but then I started my own company”. The entrepreneur E brought up that in her industry she did not think of herself as an entrepreneur who is working all the time, but she is rather a creative personality.

5.2 Different push and pull factors

Even though all entrepreneurs have different backgrounds behind their decisions to become entrepreneurs, the research will analyze each entrepreneur’s push and pull factors.

Entrepreneur	Gender	Push factors	Pull factors
A	Male	• Fired from previous workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money • Freedom • Entrepreneurial spirit from childhood
B	Male	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom • Money • Entrepreneurial spirit from teenage years
C	Male	• Frustration with previous work: different views in treatment of employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom to decide • Entrepreneurial spirit
D	Male	• Bad example of entrepreneurship from own parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom • Belief that could do better than previous owners
E	Female	• Frustration with previous work: different views with manager and owner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom • Well-being
F	Female	• Frustration with previous work: different views with new manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money • Freedom • Entrepreneurial spirit
G	Female	• Not enough work otherwise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work • Freedom • Passion for the industry
H	Female	• Frustration with previous work: salary cap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money • Freedom

Table 3: Push and Pull Factors of Entrepreneurs

Table on push and pull factors of entrepreneurs demonstrates clearly a common push factor in the interviewee's answers: the frustration with previous situations in the workplace or lack of work. Due to this, it is logical that the pull factor for career in entrepreneurship was for many money and freedom of the work environment. Only one of the entrepreneurs had oriented himself (entrepreneur B) from a young age towards entrepreneurship and started his company at the age of 21. Entrepreneur B said he was quite naïve in the beginning, as he had never seen a bad example of entrepreneurial activities, as his own father had succeeded well.

The interview results seem to contradict the general perception discussed in the literature review that male entrepreneurs would be more motivated by financial aspects of entrepreneurship as women. Possibly because Finland is an egalitarian society, the gender differences in this research are so subtle.

5.3 Challenges of Being an Employer

A common theme for entrepreneurs was to discuss during the interview the challenges of being an employer. In many interviews this was the answer to the question of what is challenging in being an entrepreneur. It became clear that it did not matter whether the company operated as business-to-business or business-to-consumer based, as there were three entrepreneurs of each category who discussed the issue.

Only two entrepreneurs did not bring up this aspect of being an employer during the interviews. Due to this, it is impossible to conclude if it is something common for all entrepreneurs or just the majority in the research sample. A difference between the industries all entrepreneurs operate in could be one of possible answers to this question.

Being a fair employer, with employees who see the common goal and are as committed to the company as the employer is, seemed to be a dream for most of the entrepreneurs.

The answers to the question of what has failed, or succeeded, while being an entrepreneur, were often related to the role of an employer. Interestingly, it depends on the person if the same employer challenge was seen as a possibility for a failure or a complete success. Entrepreneur B seemed proud to answer the question this way: "The companies have employed hundreds of people in the region and do it still. We have been able to influence in a positive way the lives of a whole community". Seeing it as a challenge entrepreneur F commented: "Trusting another person to run the business and in a small community keeping the difference between the role of a friend and of the employer can be difficult".

5.4 Hardship of Being an Entrepreneur

Entrepreneurship consists of moments that cannot be anticipated and are bound to cause some unease in the entrepreneur. The question about what makes the interviewee uneasy of the entrepreneurship clearly divided the interviewees. Some had a clear answer ready and were not shy about telling it on record, others seemed to become more hesitant and possibly did not answer directly. The answers depended

on the background and the way the company was set up. For entrepreneur E, whose business is concentrated on the creativity of the entrepreneur herself, unease brings the idea of “what if something happens to me”. Three other entrepreneurs, A, B and H, seemed to agree to the notion of solitude of decision making, financial responsibility and uncertainty of the whole. Interestingly, for another entrepreneur, F, the same thought of everything depending on her was an exciting one. It could be concluded that the perspective on this aspect depends on the way the company has been set and on what everything depends on. If the company is very dependent and centered around the entrepreneur’s person and abilities, the entrepreneurship experience might feel lonelier and more uncertain.

A common aspect of entrepreneurs interviewed for this research was their fairly quickly decision to start their career path as entrepreneurs. A push factor that was a deciding factor for many was their work situation at that time. The challenges of being an employer seemed to be thrilling at least for most of the entrepreneurs interviewed for the research.

From this research, based on the sample of entrepreneurs in Southern Finland, operating all in different industries, it can be concluded that the differences between male entrepreneurs and female entrepreneurs are based not on gender but on the backgrounds and individual characteristics of each interviewed entrepreneur. This result follows the forethought presented in the literary review chapter by Menzies et al (2004) as well as by Ahl (2006), both stating that studies show more similarities than differences between the genders in entrepreneurship. As this research is conducted in a fairly egalitarian country, the motivations and challenges of being an entrepreneur seem to be mostly similar.

A factor that could have changed the answers for both male and female entrepreneurs is if they would have small children. In that case, the perhaps the value of flexible time for the parents would have become as one of the main pull factors for the entrepreneurs. As entrepreneur E said, “children are first priority, always”. She even built the beginning of her entrepreneurial career on the assumption that everything she did for the business could be done at home, so she would be more present for her children. Only after all children had grown to certain age, did the interviewee move the shop to a busier location, where her presence was required more. Due to this, more

research is needed to find out if there are differences between genders in the case they have small children.

6. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude the thesis, the last chapter will bring up the main findings, show the shortcomings of the research completed as well as briefly discuss the implications of this thesis for international business. At the close of the chapter, suggestions shall be made for further research on the topic.

6.1. Main findings

The main findings of this thesis is that in an egalitarian society and country such as Finland, there are more similarities than differences between male and female entrepreneurs. The differences between entrepreneurs seem to be based mostly on the backgrounds, individual characteristics, especially whether they have had some examples of entrepreneurs when growing up. The push and pull factors remain similar for both genders, with differences being concentrated mostly on the previous working experiences and the importance for individual entrepreneur of money and freedom.

Shortcomings of the research conducted are centered around the interviews for this thesis. Even though eight interviews can provide certain information about the entrepreneurship in Finland, it is not enough data to make generalizations about all of Finnish entrepreneurs and particularly about all male and female entrepreneurs in general. The sample size would have to be a lot bigger in order to make generalizable claims. In addition, no entrepreneurs were interviewed who would have small children currently, for whom some of the challenges and motivations of entrepreneurs could have been different. Especially for female entrepreneurs this could have been an issue, as can be seen from previous research on female entrepreneurship in other countries. However, it should be noted that in Finland the society encourages and supports parents with parental leave, child benefits and maternity box, even state owned daycare.

Similarly, all entrepreneurs were from different industries. Concentrating on fewer industries or even on only one could have revealed more significant information about entrepreneurs; the thesis research remains on discussion about more general aspect of entrepreneurship in Finland.

For further research on this topic, it would be useful to gather a large group of entrepreneurs to be interviewed. One of the identified channels suitable here to would be to contact members of professional organizations and associations assisting entrepreneurs. There is a list of organizations and associations prepared as appendix 3, which are operating in Finland for the entrepreneurs to turn to when consultation, financing, networking events or other tasks are required. These can serve as potential clues of where to look for help for future entrepreneurs, no matter their gender.

6.2. Implications for International Business

Since the European Commission published data confirming that the female entrepreneurship percentages have decreased during between 2003 and 2012 by 1.2%, the importance of research about the challenges and original motivations of female entrepreneurs in Finland is eminently important.

As the research is concentrated on entrepreneurs in one of the most egalitarian countries of the European Union, the implications for international business that examines female entrepreneurship are critical. The thesis verifies what has been discussed in the academic literature about the differences and similarities between female and male entrepreneurs. As such, the focus on entrepreneurs in a society like Finland can give more inspiration for further research. On the other hand, as the trend of the female entrepreneurship decreasing in the Finnish society, there is a lot of details to be researched further to find out what exactly is causing the contradicting trend.

6.3. Suggestions for Further Research

One of the areas into which further research could be developed into, is the financing aspect. Finland has many organizations and associations where the starting entrepreneur can get consultation and financial help. Comparing such opportunities of entrepreneurs in Finland with the opportunities the entrepreneurs have in other

countries of the European Union would bring valuable information for the academic community.

For the question about what is the balancing factor for the entrepreneurs, it could be expected for the answer commonly to be the family and the children. As mentioned before, the Finns are stereotypically seen a nation that finds its peace of mind in the nature. Because of this, it would be interesting to compare the importance of nature to entrepreneurs in different countries. Especially the combination of answers and the differences of the nature in the country could hold value for research of well-being. Differences between rural areas and urban side of Finland as a placement for businesses and entrepreneurs is intriguing and would require more research. Concentrating more research on particular industries in Finland and comparing the results with information obtained from other industries.

As the push and pull factors remained in the center of the thesis research, even in Finland would be more research necessary. This research concentrated on eight entrepreneurs chosen by specific criteria discussed previously. There was no specific industry chosen for the research, as the objective was to keep the research as close to the general business environment in Finland as possible. Thus, more research is needed in exploring what the differences between genders would be if research was either conducted with a specific industry, age group, geographical area, with specific kinds of entrepreneurs, for example the social entrepreneurs, or on families with underage children.

On the other hand, if comparing to other countries, the differences in culture, society, history, law and politics have to be researched and compared. Because of this, one of the suitable countries to compare Finland with is Sweden, as the countries have common history and are considered similar in many ways. Concentrating on only one country and its specifics can give the opportunity to conclude the research with more specific suggestions about different trends.

The thesis research concentrated on research of entrepreneurs in Finland, as it is one of the most egalitarian countries in European Union, which makes it a great platform for true research on differences between male and female entrepreneurs as the culture and society treats both genders fairly equal. In less egalitarian countries it can be

challenging to recognize what exactly is the difference between the genders and what is grounded in the culture and society.

As the trend of female entrepreneurship is recognized as essential for the state's success in economics and social equality, it is concerning to have the female entrepreneurship percentages decreasing in Finland. Through this thesis it is acknowledged that the decrease in Finland is due not to significant gender differences. The entrepreneurs are significant for the economy of the state, and thus efforts have to be made on behalf of the government to assist its potential entrepreneurs to the career in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is a natural characteristic in the humanity seen throughout the history. All achievements of entrepreneurs are a step forward for the country they operate in, which is why the state should encourage entrepreneurship.

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APPENDIX 1 – Interview Questions

Q1: How did you end up in this career as an entrepreneur?

Q2: What pushed you to start your path to entrepreneurship?

- Was the decision made immediately or did it require a long time?

Q3: Entrepreneurship can entail long hours and inconsistent working hours. How do your family and close friends view and cope with the fact that you are an entrepreneur?

- Are there any specific rules or tactics that you use to ease the family with the fact that you are an entrepreneurship?
- Has the attitude of the family changed over time?

Q4: Life as an entrepreneur consists of lows and highs. Do you ever feel as if the spark or motivation might be lost for a moment?

- Where do you get the motivation and the spark in the moments when you are having a low moment of motivation?

Q5: Has there been entrepreneurship in your family and surroundings when growing up?

Q6: What were your expectations about being an entrepreneur before starting the career of entrepreneurship?

- Did they turn out to be false or realistic?

Q7: What do you feel is most challenging in entrepreneurship?

- How do you cope with the challenges?
- Is there anything that balances your life? What is it?

Q8: What feels as most natural aspect in entrepreneurship? What do you think is the best in entrepreneurship?

Q9: Is there anything that feels unsecure in your choice of being an entrepreneur?

- Or what makes you excited about it?

Q10: What do you feel you have succeeded in being an entrepreneur?

- What is something you have failed in being an entrepreneur?

Q11: Have you applied for external financing?

Q12: Do you have a mentor relationship with someone?

- Are you mentoring anyone?
- What do you feel that it has given you?
- If not, is there a specific reason why not?

Q13: Are you involved with the different programs and associations designed to help entrepreneurs in Finland?

- What has it helped you with the most?
- Why not?

APPENDIX 2 – Descriptions of the Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneur	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Female/male	male	male	male	male	female	female	female	female
Years of Entrepreneurship	30	38	4	7	10	12	7	10
Number of Employees	less than 10		less than 10		less than 10		less than 10	
Started the Business	x	x	x		x	x	(x)	x
Bought the Business		(x)		x			(x)	
Business to Business	x	x	x	x				x
Business to Consumer				x	x	x	x	

Table 4: Description of Entrepreneurs interviewed for the Thesis

Entrepreneur B has done both during his entrepreneurial career: bought a business as well as started his own.

Entrepreneur G has started an own business as a part of a franchising company. Due to this, it has been marked as both “bought” and “started”.

In addition, number of employees are marked with those entrepreneurs, who mentioned the information during interview. The number of employees was not separately asked during the interviews in order not to influence the interviewed entrepreneurs.

The years of entrepreneurship is bound to all companies the interviewee has begun, not only the one that is active now.

APPENDIX 3 – Organizations to help entrepreneurs in Finland

Organization	Translation to English	Clientele	Where?	Services	More information from
Suomen Yrittäjät	Finland's Entrepreneurs	Over 105 000 companies are members, companies	Whole Finland through regional offices	Counselling (especially legal counselling), educational opportunities and other	www.yrittajat.fi
Kauppakamari	Chamber of Commerce	Over 20 000 members, mostly companies	19 regional chambers of commerce ensure the coverage of whole Finland	Lobby for the ideas; goods inspection, FAI arbitration, training and events, and other	www.kauppakamari.fi
Finnvera	(Finland's official Export Credit Agency)	Around 27 000 clients	Provides services for whole Finland	Provides financing for companies	www.finnvera.fi
Yrittäjänaiset	Female entrepreneurs		70 regional organizations around Finland	Counselling, events and other	www.yrittajanaiset.fi

Table 5: Organizations for entrepreneurs in Finland

In addition to this, many universities and educational programs have their own entrepreneurial societies, which can extend help to their members.

